April 13, 2025

To: Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service Northern Region
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Dear Objection Reviewing Officer:

Thank you for considering our Objection against the Draft Decision Notice, FONSI, and Environmental Assessment for the Bonanza Project, Forest Service, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (HLCNF), Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs Ranger District.

Identification of Objectors: Lead Objector:
Michael Garrity,
Executive Director,
Alliance for the Wild Rockies (Alliance)

PO Box 505 Helena, MT 59624

Phone 406-459-5936.

And for
Sara Johnson, Director
Native Ecosystems Council
PO Box 125
Willow Creek, MT 59760

And for

Steve Kelly, Director
Council on Wildlife and Fish
P.O. Box 4641
Bozeman, MT 59772

And for

Kristine Akland
Center for Biological Diversity

P.O. Box 7274 Missoula, MT 59807

kakland@biologicaldiversity.org

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Alliance objects pursuant to 36 CFR section 218 to the Responsible Official's selection of the Proposed Action including required design features in Appendix B of this decision. The decision would log and burn on approximately 1,980 acres across the area with commercial logging and intentional burning. Additionally, the Forest Service is proposing construction of an 13.6 miles of new temporary roads, 11.3 miles of so called temporary roads that are on illegal jeep and ATV trails, and reconstructing and or

reconditioning 33.8 miles of systems roads for log haul routes.

The Alliance is objecting to this project on the grounds that implementation of the Selected Alternative would not be fully in accordance with the laws governing management of the national forests such as Clean Water Act, the ESA, NEPA, NFMA, the Helena - Lewis and Clark Forest Plan and the APA, and will result in additional degradation in already degraded watersheds and mountain slopes, further upsetting the wildlife habitat, ecosystem and human communities. Our objections are detailed below.

As a result of the Draft DN, individuals and members of the above-mentioned groups would be directly and significantly affected by the logging and associated activities. Appellants are conservation organizations working to ensure protection of biological diversity and ecosystem integrity in the Wild Rockies bioregion (including the HLCNF). The individuals and members use the project area for recreation and other forest related activities. The selected alternative would also further degrade the water quality, wildlife and fish habitat. These activities, if

implemented, would adversely impact and irreparably harm the natural qualities of the Project Area, the surrounding area, and would further degrade the watersheds and wildlife habitat.

1. Objectors names and addresses:

Lead Objector: Mike Garrity, Executive Director, Alliance

for the Wild Rockies

P.O. Box 505; Helena, MT 59624

Phone 406 459-5936

Objector Sara Jane Johnson

Director, Native Ecosystems Council,

P.O. Box 125

Willow Creek, MT;

Augusta, MT 59410

Objector Steve Kelly

Director, Council on Wildlife and Fish

P.O. Box 4641

Bozeman, MT 59772

Objector Kristine Akland
Center for Biological Diversity (CBD)

P.O. Box 7274
Missoula, MT 59807

kakland@biologicaldiversity.org

2. Signature of Lead Objector:

Signed this 13th day of April, 2025 by Lead Objector,

/s/ Michael Garrity

3. Lead Objector: Michael Garrity, Alliance for the

Wild Rockies

4. Name of the Proposed Project, Responsible Official,

National Forest and Ranger District where Project is:

Bonanza Project;

Helen Smith, Ranger, Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs Ranger District, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest is the Responsible Official. The project is in the Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs Ranger District of the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. Ranger chose the proposed Alternative in the Draft Decision Notice and FONSI.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that AWR and Native Ecosystems Council (NEC) object pursuant to 36 CFR section 218 to the Responsible Official's adoption of the Alternative 2. As discussed below, the Bonanza Project as proposed violates the National EnvironmentalPolicy Act (NEPA), the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the

Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Lewis and Clark Forest Plan and the Administrative Procedure Act (APA).

Location

The Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs Ranger District of the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest is proposing commercial logging of trees on approximately 1,980 acres. Post-logging intentional burning would be used on 1,282 acres. Locations of specific treatment methods have been determined as treatment units; however, the units would be refined through application of design features. Additionally, the Forest Service is proposing construction of an 13.6 miles of new temporary roads, 11.3 miles of so called temporary roads that are on illegal jeep and ATV trails, and reconstructing and or reconditioning 33.8 miles of systems roads for log haul routes.

The project area is located east of the City of White Sulphur Springs and south of US Highway 12 in Meagher County, Montana. The Forest administers approximately 69,708 acres of land in this island mountain range that derives its name from the tall castle-like igneous spires that stand primarily on its western slopes. The Castle Mountains drain into both the Smith River and Musselshell River watersheds and have a long history of grazing, mining, timber harvesting, and recreational use. This proposal describes activities on

National Forest System lands within the Checkerboard Creek, Flagstaff Creek, Middle North Fork Musselshell River, Alabaugh Creek, Muddy Creek, and Fourmile Creek subwatersheds.

5. Specific Issues Related to the Proposed Projects, including how Objectors believes the Environmental Analysis or Draft Decision Notice and FONSI specifically violates Law, Regulation, or Policy: We included this under number 8 below.

Thank you for the opportunity to object on the Bonanza Project. Please accept this objection from me on behalf of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Council on Wildlife and Fish, Center for Biological Diversity and Native Ecosystems Council.

6. Suggested Remedies that would Resolve the Objection:

We recommend that the "No Action Alternative" be selected. We have also made specific recommendations after each problem.

7. Supporting Reasons for the Reviewing Office to Consider:

This landscape has very high wildlife values, including for the threatened grizzly bear, lynx, big game species, and wildlife dependent upon unlogged forests. The project area will be concentrated within some of the best wildlife habitat in this landscape which is an important travel corridor for wildlife such as lynx, grizzly bears, and wolverine. The agency will also be exacerbating an ongoing problem of displacing elk to adjacent private lands in the hunting season due to a lack of security on public lands. The public interest is not being served by this project.

Suggested Remedies to Resolve the Objection:

The agency can choose the No Action Alternative or withdraw the draft decision and EA/FONSI and write an EIS that fully complies with the law.

The HLCNF must also consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service forest wide on and the impact of the project on lynx, grizzly bears and wolverines. Without these corrective actions, implementation of the the Bonanza project, will lead to severe, irretrievable impacts on almost all wildlife species on the Forest. These impacts, if continued across the HLCNF for other projects, will erode the viability of a huge number of wildlife species across this landscape.

8. Statements that Demonstrates Connection between

Prior Specific Written Comments on the Particular

Proposed Project and the Content of the Objection.

We wrote in our August 31, 2024 comments:

How often will the closures be monitored to be sure they are effective?

How will the Forest Service ensure that illegal roads or trails are not being built?

We wrote in our comments starting with the following:

The best available science, Christensen et al (1993), recommends elk habitat effectiveness of 70% in summer range and at least 50% in all other areas where elk are one of the primary resource considerations. According to Figure 1 in Christensen et al (1993), this equates to a maximum road density of approximately 0.7 mi/sq mi. in summer range and approximately 1.7 mi/sq mi. in all other areas.

Do any of the 6th Code watersheds in the Project area meet either of these road density thresholds? It appears the Project area as a whole also far exceeds these thresholds. Please disclose this type of Project level or watershed analysis on road density.

Christensen et al (1993) state that if an area is not meeting the 50% effectiveness threshold of 1.7 mi/sq mi, the agency should admit that the area is not being managed for elk: "Areas where habitat effectiveness is

retained at lower than 50 percent must be recognized as making only minor contributions to elk management goals. If habitat effectiveness is not important, don't fake it. Just admit up front that elk are not a consideration."

The Project preliminary EA does not make this admission.

Page 6 of the Wildlife report states:

Habitat Effectiveness

Habitat effectiveness is based on all motorized routes open to the public ("existing and open motorized routes").

We sent a FOIA request to the Forest Service for records of road closure violations between mid-2014 and mid-2019. In response, the Forest Service disclosed over 50 reported road closure violations in the Little Belts in that 5-year time-frame. Significantly, this data only includes the witnessed and reported violations. It is fair to assume that there are many more violations that regularly occur and are not witnessed and reported. It is also fair to assume that you have made no effort to request this available information from your own law enforcement officers, much less incorporate it into your analysis.

Considering your own admissions that road density is the primary factor that degrades elk and grizzly habitat, this is a material and significant omission from your analysis– all of your ORD and HE calculations are wrong without this information.

Will the project comply with the Eastside Assessment cover standards designed to protect and conserve elk habitat? The failure to analyze road closure violations even more egregious. Chronic, illegal road use is reasonably foreseeable and must be addressed in the cumulative effects analysis for both the Project and the Forest Plan amendment.

Additionally, your emphasis on elk populations across entire hunting districts is disingenuous and has little relevance to whether you are meeting your Forest Plan obligations to maintain sufficient elk habitat onNational Forest lands. As you note, the Forest Plan estimated that 70% of elk were taken on National Forest lands in 1986. What percentage of elk are currently taken on National Forest lands? Please disclose this information. Have you asked Montana FWP for this information? Any honest biologist would admit that high elk population numbers

do not indicate that you are appropriately managing National Forest elk habitat; to the contrary, high elk numbers indicate that you are so poorly managing elk habitat on National Forest lands that elk are being displaced to private lands where hunting is limited or prohibited. Your own Forest Service guidance document, Christensen et al 1993 states: "Reducing habitat effectiveness should never be considered as a means of controlling elk populations."

In the Bonanza Project area, what is the linear motorized route density on National Forest System lands in the action area and during implementation?

Please clarify what is going on. Have you closed or obliterated all roads that were promised to be closed or obliterated in the Travel Plan? Or, are you still waiting for funds to close or obliterate those roads? This distinction matters because you cannot honestly claim that you are meeting road density standards promised by the Travel Plan if you have not yet completed the road closures/ obliterations promised by the Travel Plan. Furthermore, as noted above, you have a major problem with recurring, chronic violations of the road closures created by the

Travel Plan, which means that your assumptions in the Travel Plan that all closures would be effective has proven false. For this reason, you cannot tier to the analysis in the Travel Plan because it is invalid. You must either complete new NEPA analysis for the Travel Plan on this issue or provide that new analysis in the NEPA analysis for this Project. Either way, you must update your open road density calculations to include all roads receiving illegal use.

Please produce the full Travel Plan on your website, as well as its full NEPA analysis. Please take a hard look at habitat effectiveness in this Project area.

Christensen et al (1993) states: "Any motorized vehicle use on roads will reduce habitat effectiveness. Recognize and deal with all forms of motorized vehicles and all uses, including administrative use." Please disclose this to the public and stop representing that roads closed to thepublic should not be included in habitat effectiveness calculations. The facts that (a) you are constructing or reconstructing over 40 miles of road for this project, (b) you have problems with recurring illegal use, and (c) youalready admit that you found another 25 miles of

illegal roads in the project area that you have not committed to obliterating, means that your conclusion that this Project will have no effect on open road density or habitat effectiveness is implausible to the point of being disingenuous. You cannot exclude these roads simply because you say they are closed to the public. Every road receiving motorized use must be included in the HE calculation. You must consider all of this road use in order to take a hard look that is fully and fairly informed regarding habitat effectiveness. In the very least you must add in all "non-system" roads, i.e. illegal roads, as well as recurring illegal road use (violations) in your ORD calculations. Also, as a side note, your calculations in Table 12 give the HE of the existing condition, not the HE during the project.

Christensen et al 1993 finds: "Areas where habitat effectiveness is retained at lower than 50 percent must be recognized as making only minor contributions to elk management goals. If habitat effectiveness is notimportant, don't fake it. Just admit up front that elk are not a consideration."

You fail to make this admission and instead represent that you are meeting all relevant objectives.

The Forest Service responded on page 5 of the Decision Notice;

In recognizing the importance of these current road closures to meet desired road density objectives for big game as well as other resource concerns, my recreation and engineering staff routinely survey, maintain and repair any damage as needed to physical road closure devices, barriers and signage to meet objectives of the travel management plan to ensure these closures are effective within the project area In the event that illegal road useoccurs, the Forest Service Enforcement Division handles these cases as applicable under the code of Federal Regulations.

On appendix C, page 172. The Forest Service wrote:
Elk habitat effectiveness will be maintained.

Standard is being met at the Forest level. Designated trails are open to ORV's in addition to restricted seasonal use to address user conflict, safety and protection of resources based on the 2007 Lewis and Clark Travel Plan.

On appendix C, page 179. The Forest Service wrote:

Open all areas and trails to ORVs, except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity. Closures or restrictions may be used to: (1) resolve user conflict; (2) promote user safety; or (3) protect resources. Elk habitat effectiveness will be maintained.

Standard is currently being met and would continue during and following project implementation.

The Standard is not being met and therefore this is a NEPA, NFMA and APA violation.

The Bonanza project is in violation of NEPA for not responding to our comments. The standard is not being met at the project level and their is no evidence provided that it is being met at the Forest Plan level.

The project is in violation of NEPA, NFMA, the Forest Plan, The Travel Plan, the APA and the ESA because of the recurring road closure violations. your assumptions in the Travel Plan that all closures would be effective has proven

false. For this reason, you cannot tier to the analysis in the Travel Plan because it is invalid.

The Project violates the Forest Plan; the Project EA violates NEPA; and/or the Revised Forest Plan violates the NFMA planning regulations regarding elk.

In 2012, the Forest Service issued new forest planning regulations, which are referred to as the "2012 Planning Rule."

The 2012 Planning Rule states that its purpose is "to guide the collaborative and science-based development, amendment, and revision of land management plans that promote the ecological integrity of national forests and grasslands and other administrative units of the NFS. Plans will guide management of NFS lands so that they are ecologically sustainable and contribute to social and economic sustainability; consist of ecosystems and watersheds with ecological integrity and diverse plant and animal communities; and have the capacity to provide people and communities with ecosystem services and multiple uses that provide a range of social, economic, and ecological benefits for the present and into the future. These benefits include clean air and water; habitat for fish, wildlife, and plant communities; and opportunities for recreational, spiritual, educational, and cultural benefits." 36 C.F.R. §219.1(c).

The 2012 Planning Rule requires that forest plans "use a complementary ecosystem and species-specific approach to provide for the diversity of plant and animal communities and maintain the persistence of native species in the plan area. Ecosystem plan components would be required for ecosystem integrity and diversity, along with additional, species-specific plan components where necessary to provide the ecological conditions to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, sensitive species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain viable populations of species of conservation concern."

150. The 2012 Planning Rule states that "[t]he Department intends to provide for the persistence of all native species by the use of the coarse-filter/fine-filter approach, within Forest Service authority and the inherent capability of the plan area. [The Rule] provides a three-fold treatment of all native species. First, [the Rule] requires coarse-filter plan components for the maintenance and restoration of the ecological integrity and diversity of ecosystems in the plan area. Plan components will support the long-term persistence of most native species in the plan area, including providing for species that are common or secure. Second, species that are federally recognized species under ESA (threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species) may not have viable populations on NFS lands and whose recovery, in most cases, cannot be achieved

on a single NFS plan area. [The Rule] requires the responsible official to develop coarse-filter plan components, and fine-filter plan components where necessary, to contribute to the recovery of listed species and conserve proposed and candidate species. Third, [the Rule] requires the responsible official to develop coarse-filter plan components, and fine-filter plan components where necessary, to provide the desired ecological conditions necessary to maintain viable populations of conservation concern within the plan area, or to contribute to maintaining a viable population of a species of conservation concern across its range where it is not within the Agency's authority or is beyond the inherent capability of the plan area to provide the ecological conditions to maintain a viable population of that species within the plan area."

The 2012 Planning Rule states: "The ecosystem integrity and diversity requirements [in the Rule] are meant to provide a coarse-filter designed to maintain biological diversity. By working toward diverse, connected ecosystems with ecological integrity, the Agency expects that over time, management will create ecological conditions which support the abundance, distribution, and long-term persistence of most native species within a plan area, as well as provide for diversity of plant and animal communities.

The 2012 Planning Rule states: “The fine-filter provisions are intended to provide a safety net for those species whose specific habitat needs or other influences on their life requirements may not be fully met under the coarse-filter provisions.”

The 2012 Planning Rule mandates: “Ecosystem Integrity. The plan must include plan components, including standards or guidelines, to maintain or restore the ecological integrity of terrestrial . . . ecosystems . . . in the plan area, including plan components to maintain or restore . . . function . . . and connectivity[.]” 36 C.F.R. §219.8 (a)(1),

The 2012 Planning Rule similarly mandates: “Ecosystem diversity. The plan must include plan components, including standards or guidelines, to maintain or restore the diversity of ecosystems and habitat types throughout the plan area. In doing so, the plan must include plan components to maintain or restore: . . . (ii) Rare . . . terrestrial. . . animal communities . . . .” 36 C.F.R. §219.9 (a)(2). Compliance with this provision “is intended to . . . support the persistence of most native species in the plan area.” 36 C.F.R. §219.9.

The 2012 Planning Rule mandates: “The plan must include plan components, including standards or guidelines, for integrated resource management to provide for ecosystem services and multiple uses in the plan area. When developing plan components for

integrated resource management . . . the responsible official shall consider: . . . (5) Habitat conditions . . . for wildlife, . . . commonly enjoyed and used by the public[] for hunting . . . .” 36 C.F.R. §219.10 (a)(5).

The 2012 Planning Rule explains: "The Department modified the list . . . to emphasize that responsible officials . . . should specifically consider habitat conditions for species that are used or enjoyed by the public for recreational opportunities such as hunting . . . and added a requirement that the responsible official collaborate with other land managers in doing so. . . .”

The 2012 Planning Rule states: "Comment: Game species. Some respondents
felt the rule should include requirements for species that are hunted, fished, or trapped . . . . Response: The Agency recognizes the important role of NFS lands in providing the habitat for these species. Plan components . . . will provide the habitat and other ecological conditions necessary to support these species."

The 2012 Planning Rule requires: “The responsible official shall use the best available scientific information to inform the planning process required by this subpart for assessment; developing, amending, or revising a plan; and monitoring. In doing so, the responsible official shall determine what information is the most accurate, reliable, and relevant to the issues being considered. The responsible official shall document how the best

available scientific information was used to inform the assessment, the plan or amendment decision, and the monitoring program as required in §§219.6(a)(3) and 219.14(a)(3). Such documentation must: Identify what information was determined to be the best available scientific information, explain the basis for that determination, and explain how the information was applied to the issues considered." 36 C.F.R. §219.3.

The 2012 Planning Rule mandates: "Every project and activity must be consistent with the applicable plan components. A project or activity approval document must describe how the project or activity is consistent with applicable plan components developed or revised in conformance with this part by meeting the following criteria: (1) Goals, desired conditions, and objectives. The project or activity . . . does not foreclose the opportunity to maintain or achieve any goals, desired conditions, or objectives, over the long term. (2) Standards. The project or activity complies with applicable standards. (3) Guidelines. The project or activity: (i) Complies with applicable guidelines as set out in the plan; or (ii) Is designed in a way that is as effective in achieving the purpose of the applicable guidelines (§219.7(e)(1)(iv)). (4) Suitability. A project or activity would occur in an area: (i) That the plan identifies as suitable for that type of project or activity; or (ii) For which the plan is silent with respect to its

suitability for that type of project or activity." 36 C.F.R. §219.15.

In 2021, the Forest issued a Revised Forest Plan under the 2012 Planning Rule. However, rather than enhance protections for elk consistent with the mandates of the 2012 Planning Rule discussed above, the Revised Forest Plan removed all standards for elk habitat protection from the Forest Plan.

The original Forest Plan had numeric standards for (1) maintaining a minimum percentage of elk hiding cover (i.e. maintaining a certain amount of tree cover), (2) maintaining a minimum percentage of elk thermal cover (i.e. maintaining a certain amount of tree cover), and (3) maintaining a minimum percentage of elk habitat effectiveness (i.e. limiting roads to low levels for elk security).

In contrast, the Revised Forest Plan removed all numeric standards for elk that had ensured a minimum amount of tree cover, and limited the number of roads, in elk habitat across the Forest.

In lieu of numeric standards, the Revised Forest Plan now contains only "desired conditions" and a single guideline, with no specific numeric thresholds, to manage elk habitat across the Forest.

Revised Forest Plan Desired Condition FW-FWL-DC-01 states: "Big game species remain on NFS lands

throughout the archery and rifle hunting seasons at levels that support Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks recommendations regarding big game distribution, population size, and harvest."

Revised Forest Plan Desired Condition FW-FWL-DC-04 states: "Levels and types of public motorized access during the archery and rifle hunting seasons are balanced with desired conditions for wildlife populations and habitat security, as well as with other resource desired conditions."

Revised Forest Plan Guideline FW-FWL-GDL-01 states: "Prior to management actions that would increase or change the location, timing, mileage, or density of wheeled motorized routes open during the archery and rifle hunting seasons, FS biologists should coordinate with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks biologists to identify possible management actions that may reduce the potential for displacement of big game species from NFS lands during the archery and rifle hunting seasons. Possible management actions may vary on a project-specific or local basis, and should be based on scientific information and the most current recommendations made through agency or interagency efforts (such as that described in the U.S. Forest Service and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Collaborative Overview and Recommendations for Elk Habitat Management on the Custer, Gallatin, Helena, and Lewis and Clark National Forests 2013, or subsequent versions

[commonly referred to as the Eastside Assessment]). Also see appendix C section titled "Elk and Other Big Game Species." In the Revised Forest Plan EIS, the Forest Service argued that this sea change in Forest management was valid because purportedly "elk numbers are above established population objectives throughout most of central MT, and elk are increasingly moving to private lands during hunting season . . . regardless of . . . amounts of security on adjacent NFS lands . . . ."

First, the Project violates the Revised Forest Plan. The Project EA lacks any disclosure or discussion of the two Forest Plan desired conditions and one Forest Plan guideline that apply to this Project: FW-FWL-DC-01 and - 04 and FW-FWL-GDL-01, which are quoted above. It is undisputed that "90-95% of the elk in this HD are located on private land during the general rifle season . . . primarily due to poor elk security." This is the precise concern that the desired conditions and guideline were supposed to protect against – but there is no meaningful analysis of this fact anywhere in the Project EA. The comments from MFWP, existing lack of elk security (less than 30%) and low habitat effectiveness (less than 50%) on Forest lands in the Project area, and the Forest Service's refusal to make any improvements with this Project to meet basic minimum requirements for elk habitat indicate that the Forest Service is not complying with either desired condition or the guideline. Further,

contrary to the guideline, the Forest Service refused to work with MFWP to implement the Eastside Assessment and reduce elk displacement in the Project area by setting a scientifically-based numeric minimum threshold percentage for elk security and habitat effectiveness, and closing roads to achieve those minimum numeric thresholds. Additionally, contrary to the Eastside Assessment, the Forest Service refused to provide "maximum protection" to elk winter range on NFS lands, and instead authorized over 10 miles of new temporary road construction in elk winter range. Similarly, the Forest Service refused to implement the recommendations of Coordinating Elk and Timber Management regarding maintaining a low road density and not constructing roads in elk winter range. In violation of NFMA, NEPA, and the APA, the Forest Service has failed to comply with its own Forest Plan desired conditions and guideline, and has failed to otherwise establish that the project "is designed in a way that is as effective in achieving the purpose of the applicable guideline[.]"

Second, alternatively or in addition, the Project EA violates NEPA. As noted above, is undisputed that "90-95% of the elk in this HD are located on private land during the general rifle season . . . primarily due to poor elk security." There is no disclosure and meaningful analysis of this fact anywhere in the Project EA. In fact, none of the findings and concerns of MFWP quoted

above were shared with the public in the Project EA, which violates NEPA's requirements that the data and assumptions in an EA cannot be incomplete or false, and that the Forest Service cannot withhold information from the public in the EA. Additionally, none of the proposals for increasing elk security provided by MFWP were considered in an alternative in the Project EA – which means the Project EA did not consider a reasonable range of alternatives. Furthermore, by failing to disclose key facts provided by MFWP, Forest Plan requirements, recommendations from the Eastside Assessment and Coordinating Elk and Timber Management, and a comparison between the well-established default scientific thresholds for security (at least 30%) and habitat effectiveness (at least 50%) as compared to Project conditions (pre-, during-, and post-), the Project EA fails to take a hard look at one of the most important public issues on this National Forest – the exacerbation of elk displacement off public lands from logging projects, and the refusal of the Forest Service to take available action to maintain and restore public elk-hunting habitat on National Forest lands.

Third, alternatively or in addition, the Revised Forest Plan violates the 2012 NFMA Planning Rule. A forest plan must include standards or guidelines to protect habitat for game species commonly used by the public for hunting. As set forth above, the 2012 Planning Rule mandates that a forest plan include "standards or

guidelines" that "maintain or restore the ecological integrity of terrestrial . . . ecosystems . . . in the plan area, including plan components to maintain or restore . . . function . . ." 36 C.F.R. §219.8 (a)(1). The 2012 Planning Rule similarly mandates that a forest plan include "standards or guidelines" that address "Habitat conditions . . . for wildlife, . . . commonly enjoyed and used by the public[] for hunting . . . ." 36 C.F.R. §219.10 (a)(5). Regarding 36 C.F.R. §219.10 (a)(5), the 2012

Planning Rule states: "The Agency recognizes the important role of NFS lands in providing the habitat for these species. Plan components . . . will provide the habitat and other ecological conditions necessary to support these species." In implementing these standard or guidelines, the Forest Service must use the best available science. 36 C.F.R. §219.3. The Revised Forest Plan violates the 2012 Planning Rule because elk are a species commonly hunted by the public, but the Revised Forest Plan does not include the scientifically-based standards or guidelines necessary to support functioning elk habitat on Forest lands during the public hunting season. The Revised Forest Plan contains one elk habitat guideline; the Forest Service interprets the guideline to provide no enforceable protections for maintaining a scientifically-based minimum percentage of elk security and elk habitat effectiveness, and interprets the guideline to require no action to restore public land elk hunting habitat in areas like this Project area, where the elk security is so

egregiously low that 90-95% of elk are displaced from public lands during hunting season. If the Revised Forest Plan does not protect, and requires no restorative action, for elk habitat that is in as dire straits as the elk habitat in the Bonanza Project Area, then the Revised Forest Plan provides no meaningful protection at all for elk habitat and the public elk-hunting experience, which violates the purpose, intent, and plain language of the 2012 NFMA Planning Rule, as well as NFMA and the APA.

Remedy: Choose the No Action Alternative or write an EIS that fully complies with the law.

We wrote in our comments:

Page 4 of the Bonanza Preliminary Report states:

"The predominant goal of the treatment is to maintain, restore, and enhance ecological integrity, diversity, function, and resiliency within structural and functional properties that would enable vegetative communities to persist into the future. This objective is designed to move the project area toward desired vegetative conditions as outlined in the Forest Plan. This includes tree species presence, size class, density, and large tree structure. This would be achieved using harvest treatment methods identified in the proposed action."

The Forest Service has not shown that the project will meet the desired vegetative conditions as outlined in the Forest Plan.

Because of this, the project is not meeting the purpose and need of the project.

Please explain how the project will meet the desired vegetative conditions as outlined in the Forest Plan.

The Preliminary EA does not clearly demonstrate that the project uses a legal definition of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in violation of NEPA, NFMA, the Healthy Forest Act and the APA. The Bonanza project purpose and need is based on false assumptions in violation of NEPA, NFMA and the APA.

Did the Forest Service conduct NEPA analysis (i.e. an EA or EIS) for the Fire Plan the Forest is using for this project? If you don't the project will be in violation of NEPA, NFMA, and the APA.

S1, S2, S5, and S6. In particular, fuel treatment projects may occur in the WUI even though they will not meet standards Veg S1, S2, S5, or S6, provided they do not

occur on more than 6% of lynx habitat on each Nation- al Forest. Allowing the agency to destroy or adversely modify any lynx critical habitat has the potential to appreciably reduce the conservation value of such habitat. The agency cannot simply set a cap at 6% forest-wide without looking at the individual characteristics of each LAU to determine whether the project has the potential to appreciably reduce the conservation value. The ESA requires the use of the best available science at the site-specific level. It does not allow the agencies to make a gross determination that allowing lynx critical habitat to be destroyed forest-wide while not appreciably reduce the conservation value.

Please provide a map showing the WUI and the locations of all homes in comparison to the project area.

If the Forest Service did not conduct NEPA for the Fire Plan, please disclose the cumulative effects of Forest-wide implementation of the Fire Plan in the project EIS, or EA if you refuse to write an EIS, to avoid illegally tiering to a non NEPA document. Specifically analyze the decision to prioritize mechanical, human-designed, somewhat arbitrary treatments as a replacement for naturally-occurring fire.

Did the Forest Service conduct ESA consultation for the Fire Plan?

Page 13 of the Wildlife Report states:

"Based on the standards in the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD) no stand initiation habitat would be treated via precommercial thinning, except for those within the wildland urban interface (WUI) for hazardous fuels treatments; there are no treatments in multistory mature habitat, except for those within the WUI for hazardous fuels treatments."

Please demonstrate that the project uses a legal definition of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in violation of NEPA, NFMA, the Healthy Forest Act.

The Forest Service responded:

The Bonanza Project includes commercial timber harvest and does not include a fuels reduction component. The resource reports and Environmental Assessment have been revised to clarify this.

The Forest Service did not respond to our comments. The project is therefore in violation of NEPA, NFMA, the APA and the ESA.

Remedy: Please choose the No Action Alternative or withdraw the DN and FONSI and write a an EIS that fully complies with the law.

We wrote in our comments:

Climate Change

Please follow NEPA and take a hard look at the impact of the project on climate change.

Page 12 of the Preliminary EA states:

"Carbon initially emitted as a result of the project would have a temporary influence on atmospheric concentrations as forest growth and regrowth continues to uptake carbon. Commercial timber harvest can provide for long-term carbon storage off-site in harvested wood products. The proposed Bonanza Project is consistent with the Forest Plan and with internationally recognized climate change adaptation and mitigation practices."

The federal district court of Montana recently ruled against the Kootenai National Forest on the same boiler plate analysis, writing:

"Ultimately, greenhouse gas reduction must happen quickly, and removing carbon from forests in the form of logging, even if trees are going to grow back, will take decades to centuries to re-sequester. Put more simply, logging causes immediate carbon losses, while re-sequestration happens slowly over time, time that the planet may not have."

Please find the court's order attached.

Please follow NEPA and take a hard look at the impact of the project on climate change.

In the Preliminary EA, the Forest Service failed to take a "hard look" at the carbon and climate impacts of removing hundreds of thousands of trees from the Forest. The Forest Service dismissed the impacts of logging these mature forests as "infinitesimal," ignoring years of science, agency guidance, and pertinent legal precedent,

and failed to address the climate pollution caused by cutting, hauling, and processing timber.

Council on Environmental Quality ("CEQ") guidance addressing climate change recognizes that logging and prescribed burning can impact carbon stores, and urges land management agencies to "include a comparison of estimated net GHG emissions and carbon stock changes that are projected to occur with and without implementation of proposed land or resource management actions." Please find attached, CEQ, Final Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Effects of Climate Change in National Environmental Policy Act Reviews (Aug. 1, 2016) at 25-26, available at https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/ceq-regulations-and-guidance/nepa_final_ghg_guidance.pdf

Numerous studies, including those by the Forest Service, have concluded that logging mature forests releases significant amounts of carbon stored in the trees by preventing such forests from continuing to sequester carbon in trees and roots. FS17007. When forest stands are cut down, the vast majority of the stored carbon in the forest is released over time as CO2, thereby converting forests from a sink to a "source" or "emitter." See FS7888 (study reporting "[i]ncreased harvest through proposed thinning practices in [Oregon] has been shown to elevate emissions for decades to centuries regardless of product end use").

Please find attached, "The Enduring World Forest Carbon Sink: Key Findings and Policy Implications Forests play a critical role in mitigating climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere." This new study led by Yude Pan, research scientist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station, provides a unique perspective and a long-term, ground- based benchmark on the recent magnitude, trends, drivers, and locations of Earth's critical forest carbon sinks.

It found that deforestation, degradation, and disturbances pose significant threats to forest carbon sinks.

It recommends halting deforestation and degradation while increasing large-scale reforestation and afforestation are crucial for sustaining and enhancing forest carbon sinks.

Please develop an alternative that maximizes the amount of carbon the project area absorbs.

The Forest Service responded:

Response: See the Carbon/Climate Report, which describes the estimated greenhouse gas emissions based on 100 cubic feet (CCF) harvested and the estimated social cost of greenhouse gas emissions. The quantitative methodology is explained and summarized in a greenhouse gas emission equivalency context document found in the project record. The proposed action would contribute to resiliency and healthy

forest stands, which would allow old growth to develop sustainably in the forest and increase carbon storage. There would be carbon loss in the short term in the Bonanza Project, but the proposed action would move the Forest toward desired conditions for healthier and resilient trees, and there would be more carbon stored in the long term than under existing conditions.

Achievable future conditions as a framework for guiding forest conservation and management, Forest Ecology and Management 360 (2016) 80–96, S.W. Golladay et al. (Please, find attached).

Stands are at risk of going from forest to non-forest, even without the added risk of "management" as proposed in the project area.

The Helena Lewis and Clark National Forest has not yet accepted that the effects of climate risk represent a significant issue, and eminent loss of forest resilience already, and a significant and growing risk into the "foreseeable future?"

It is now time to speak honestly about unrealistic expectations relating to desired future condition. Forest managers have failed to disclose that at least five common

tree species, including aspens and four conifers, are at great risk unless atmospheric greenhouse gases and associated temperatures can be contained at today's levels of concentration in the atmosphere. This cumulative ("reasonably foreseeable") risk must not continue to be ignored at the project-level, or at the programmatic (Forest Plan) level.

Global warming and its consequences may also be effectively irreversible which implicates certain legal consequences under NEPA and NFMA and ESA (e.g., 40 CFR § 1502.16; 16 USC §1604(g); 36 CFR §219.12; ESA Section 7; 50 CFR §§402.9, 402.14). All net carbon emissions from logging represent "irretrievable and irreversible commitments of resources."

It is clear that the management of the planet's forests is a nexus for addressing this largest crisis

ever facing humanity. Yet the EA fails to even provide a minimal quantitative analysis of project- or agency-caused CO_2 emissions or consider the best available science on the topic. This is immensely unethical and immoral. The lack of detailed scientific discussions in the EA concerning climate change is far more troubling than the document's failures on other topics, because the consequences of unchecked climate change will be disastrous for food production, sea level rise, and water supplies, resulting in complete turmoil for all human societies. This is an issue as

serious a nuclear annihilation (although at least with the latter we're not already pressing the button).

The EA provided a pittance of information on climate change effects on project area vegetation. The EA provides no analysis as to the veracity of the project's Purpose and Need, the project's objectives, goals, or desired conditions. The FS has the responsibility to inform the public that climate change is and will be bringing forest change. For the Galton project, this did not happen, in violation of NEPA.

The EA fails to consider that the effects of climate change on the project area, including that the "desired" vegetation conditions will likely not be achievable or sustainable. The EA fails to provide any credible analysis as to how realistic and achievable its desired conditions are in the context of a rapidly changing climate, along an unpredictable but changing trajectory.

The Forest Plan does not provide meaningful direction on climate change. Nor does the EA acknowledge pertinent and highly relevant best available science on climate change. This project is in violation of NEPA.

The EA does not analyze or disclose the body of science that implicates logging activities as a contributor to reduced carbon stocks in forests and increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The EA fails to provide estimates of the total amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2) or other greenhouse gas emissions caused by FS management actions and policies —forest-wide, regionally, or nationally. Agency

policymakers seem comfortable maintaining a position that they need not take any leadership on this issue, and obfuscate via this EA to justify their failures.

The best scientific information strongly suggests that management that involves removal of trees and other biomass increases atmospheric CO_2. Unsurprisingly the EA doesn't state that simple fact.

The EA fails to present any modeling of forest stands under different management scenarios. The FS should model the carbon flux over time for its proposed stand management scenarios and for the various types of vegetation cover found on the GNF.

The EA also ignores CO_2 and other greenhouse gas emissions from other common human

activities related to forest management and recreational uses. These include emissions associated with machines used for logging and associated activities, vehicle use for administrative actions, and recreational motor vehicles. The FS is simply ignoring the climate impacts of these management and other authorized activities.

The Committee of Scientists, 1999 recognize the importance of forests for their contribution to global climate regulation. Also, the 2012 Planning Rule recognizes, in its definition of Ecosystem services, the "Benefits people obtain from ecosystems, including: (2) Regulating services, such as long term storage of carbon; climate regulation..."

We have no more time to prevaricate, and it's not a battle we can afford to lose. We each have a choice: submit to status quo for the

profits of the greediest 1%, or empower ourselves to limit greenhouse gas emissions so not just a couple more generations might survive.

Remedy: Choose the No Action Alternative. Revise the Forest Plan to take a hard look at the science of climate change. Alternatively, draft a new EIS for this project if the FS still wants to pursue it, which includes an analysis that examines climate change in the context of project activities and Desired Conditions. Better yet, it's time to prepare an EIS on the whole bag of U.S. Government climate policies.

We wrote in our comments, starting with:

Will the Bonanza Project make the area more vulnerable to wildfire?

Will the project meet the Purpose and Need?

Please see the column below by Dr. Chad Hanson.

https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/590415-logging-makes-forests-and-homes-more-vulnerable-to

"Logging makes forests and homes more vulnerable to wildfires"

The Forest Service responded:

Response: The proposed action is designed to meet the Purpose and Need: (1) ecosystem resiliency, diversity, and restoration, and (2) wood products for local economies. The proposed action is not designed specifically to address wildfire risk. As discussed in the Fuels Report with supporting sources (pp. 6-7), the proposed action would change fire behavior and would result in less risk of passive or active crown fire because of changes to stand structure and composition. It is our professional judgement that forestBonanza Project, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest

health will be improved by increasing ecosystem resiliency and diversity through the restorative nature of the proposed action. See definition of Forest Health in Helena-Lewis and Clark Forest Plan (2021).

Issue: The project does not define resilience or adequately inform the public on how the proposed action would improve resilience and forest health. Some comments specifically noted concern about prescribed fire and fuels reduction.

Response: Resilience is defined as the degree to which forests and ecosystems can recover from one or more disturbances without a major shift in composition or function, and is the most commonly suggested

adaptation option discussed in a climate-change context. Resilience is determined at the landscape/ ecosystem level and not at the individual stand level. Forest health is measured in terms of the natural range of variation and moving towards Forest Plan desired conditions. A diversity of age classes can be achieved by moving towards desired conditions which are based on the historic composition of the forest.
See the resource reports for discussion of the project effects and consistency with Forest Plan direction, including desired conditions in the Castles Geographic Area.
The project does not include a fuels reduction component. The project is designed to meet the Purpose and Need, which is site-specific. The proposed action is not specifically designed to address wildfire risk.
The project would not preclude natural fire, an important part of ecosystem function. The referenced sources from commenters provide a broad overview of forest management and fire from a range of locations and conditions, or in another location with very different conditions than the Bonanza Project.
Articles of broad conditions and outcomes for forest management can provide the foundation for analysis and planning, but the findings are not applicable for all projects. See the Literature Review section of this appendix.

Dr. Baker's paper is the best available science. Please explain why this project is not following the best available science. The Draft Decision Notice is in violation of NEPA, NFMA, the Forest Plan and the APA

The Remedy is to withdraw with the Draft Decision Notice and write an EIS that fully complies with the law or choose the no action alternative.

Dr. Baker's paper is the best available science. Please explain why this project is not following the best available science. The Draft Decision Notice is in violation of NEPA.

Remedy, choose the No Action Alternative or write an EIS that complies with the law.

In "Fire Ecology in Rocky Mountain Landscapes" by William Baker, Dr. Baker writes on page 435, " ***…a prescribed fire regime that is too frequent can reduce species diversity (Laughlin and Grace 2006) and favor invasive species (M.A. Moritz and Odion 2004). Fire that is entirely low severity in ecosystems that historically experience some high-severity fire may not favor germination of fire-dependent species (M.A. Moritiz and Odion 2004) or provide habitat key animals (Smucker, Hutto, and Steele 2005)***." Baker continues on page 436:

"Fire rotations equal the average mean fire interval across a landscape and are appropriate intervals at which individual points or the whole landscape is burned. Composite fire intervals underestimate mean fire interval and fire rotation (chap 5) and should not be used as prescribed burning intervals as this would lead to too much fire and would likely lead to adversely affect biological diversity (Laughlin and Grace 2006)."

Please find (Laughlin and Grace 2006) attached.

We wrote in our comments:

"The Forest Service should use the best available science regarding protecting these structures.

Fire Ecology in Rocky Mountain Landscapes, by William Baker says the Forest Service is over stating the frequency of wildfire. I have included this book as an attachment in my previous comments and incorporate it into these comments.

Dr. Baker writes that we use to think we could control wildfire with tools such as prescribed burns. He writes the science shows this is not true. All we can do is have the good sense to get our homes and infrastructure protected or out of fire prone settings, as fire will eventually come. This project attempts to tame wildlife, something Dr. Baker says is impossible. This project therefore violates NFMA by not following the best

available science and not meeting the purpose and need of the project."

It is a violation of NEPA to not consider the best available science. We asked you to consider Baker's Fire Ecology in Rocky Mountain Landscapes and it is not even in your bibliography.

I am mailing Fire Ecology in Rocky Mountain Landscapes" by William Baker via U.S. mail. Please put the entire book in the project file.

Dr. Baker estimates the high severity fire rotation to be 135 - 280 years for lodgepole pine forests. (See page 162.). Baker writes on page 457-458 of Fire Ecology in Rocky Mountain Landscapes: "***Fire rotation has been estimated as about 275 years in the Rockies as a whole since 1980 and about 247 years in the northern Rockies over the last century, and both figures are near the middle between the low (140 years) and high (328 years) estimates for fire rotation for the Rockies under the HRV (chap. 10). These estimates suggest the since EuroAmerican settlement, fire control and other activities may have reduced fire somewhat in particular places, but a general syndrome of fire exclusion is lacking. Fire exclusion also does not accurately characterize the effects of land users on fire or match the pattern of change in area burned at the state level over the last century (fig 10.9). In contrast, fluctuation in drought linked to atmospheric conditions appear to match many state-level patterns in burned area over the last century. Land uses that also match***

fluctuations include logging, livestock grazing, roads and development, which have generally increased flammability and ignition at a time when the climate is warming and more fire is coming."

Schoennagel et al (2004) states: "High-elevation subalpine forests in the Rocky Mountains typify ecosystems that experience infrequent, high-severity crown fires []. . . The most extensive subalpine forest types are composed of Engelmann spruce (Picea engelmannii), subalpine fir (Abies lasiocarpa), and lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta), all thin-barked trees easily killed by fire. Extensive stand-replacing fires occurred historically at long intervals (i.e., one to many centuries) in subalpine forests, typically in association with infrequent high-pressure blocking systems that promote extremely dry regional climate pat-terns." Please find Schoennagel et al (2004) attached.

Schoennagel et al (2004) states: "it is unlikely that the short period of fire exclusion has significantly altered the long fire intervals in subalpine forests. Furthermore, large, intense fires burning under dry conditions are very difficult, if not impossible, to suppress, and such fires account for the majority of area burned in subalpine forests.

Schoennagel et al (2004) states: "Moreover, there is no consistent relationship between time elapsed since the last fire and fuel abundance in subalpine forests, further undermining the idea that years of fire suppression have caused unnatural fuel buildup in this forest zone." Schoennagel et al (2004) states: "No evidence suggests that spruce–fir or lodgepole pine forests have experienced

substantial shifts in stand structure over recent decades as a result of fire suppression. Overall, variation in cli-mate rather than in fuels appears to exert the largest influence on the size, timing, and se-verity of fires in subalpine forests []. We conclude that large, infrequent stand replacing fires are ‘business as usual’ in this forest type, not an artifact of fire suppression.”.

Schoennagel et al (2004) states: “Contrary to popular opinion, previous fire suppression, which was consistently effective from about 1950 through 1972, had only a minimal effect on the large fire event in 1988 []. Reconstruction of historical fires indicates that similar large, high-severity fires also occurred in the early 1700s []. Given the historical range of variability of fire regimes in high- elevation subalpine forests, fire behavior in Yellowstone during 1988, al-though severe, was neither unusual nor surprising.”

Schoennagel et al (2004)states: “Mechanical fuel reduction in subalpine forests would not represent a restoration treatment but rather a departure from the natural range of variability in stand structure.”

Schoennagel et al (2004) states: “Given the behavior of fire in Yellowstone in 1988, fuel reduction projects probably will not substantially reduce the frequency, size, or severity of wildfires under extreme weather conditions.”

Schoennagel et al (2004) states: “The Yellow-stone fires in 1988 revealed that variation in fuel conditions, as measured by stand age and density, had only minimal influence on

fire behavior. Therefore, we expect fuel- reduction treatments in high-elevation forests to be generally unsuccessful in reducing fire frequency, severity, and size, given the overriding importance of extreme climate in controlling fire regimes in this zone. Thinning also will not re-store subalpine forests, because they were dense historically and have not changed significantly in response to fire suppression. Thus, fuel- reduction efforts in most Rocky Mountain subalpine forests probably would not effectively mitigate the fire hazard, and these efforts may create new ecological problems by moving the forest structure out-side the historic range of variability."

Please find Schoennagel et al (2004) attached.

The draft decision is in violation of NEPA, NFMA, the ESA and the APA because the project will adversely affect biological diversity, is not following the best available since and the purpose and need will not work.

Remedy: Choose the No Action Alternative or write an EIS that fully complies with the law.

We wrote in our comments:

Please disclose the last time the Project area was surveyed

for grizzly bears, whitebark pine, wolverines, pine

martins, northern goshawk, and lynx.

Please disclose how often the Project area has been surveyed for whitebark pine, wolverines, pine martins, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, and lynx.

Would the habitat be better for whitebark pine, wolverines, pine martins, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, and lynx if roads were removed in the Project area?

Please provide us with the full BA for the whitebark pine, wolverines, pine martins, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, and lynx.

The wildlife report states on page 4:

The project area is within Grizzly Bear Management Zone 3, as identified in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy. Though they may be present, grizzly bear occurrence has not been documented in the Bonanza project area specifically or the Castles Geographic Area (GA) in general as of 2020 (Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Subcommittee, 2019). There is not enough suitable habitat to support population growth within

Grizzly Bear Management Zone 3 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021a).

Page 20 of the wildlife report states:

"Motorized Access and Secure Habitat

The proposed action would construct approximately 13.6 miles of temporary roads for project activities, in the Castles Grizzly Bear Analysis Unit (GBAU) (Table 9). Of this, 0.76 miles overlap five separate secure habitat patches in the Castles GBAU. All other roadwork associated with this project is for the purpose of improving or maintaining existing routes, some of which are open to public use and some not. Some GBAUs would have temporary increases in the number of motorized routes due to project activities. While project operations are on-going, grizzly bears would most likely find the project activities a local barrier to movement; for a time they would need to select alternate travel routes or move through the area when workers are not present (at night, on off-days)."

If the Forest Service removed roads in the project area and didn't build any new roads would there be secure habitat for grizzly bears?

Please formally consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on the impact of the project on grizzly bears.

Please formally consult with the FWS on the impact of the project on wolverine.

The Forest Service responded:

Response: The Bonanza Project would not permanently change the road density. Temporary roads would be obliterated after the project is complete. Temporary roads constructed on existing templates would be restored to the pre-project condition. Please see the Transportation and Wildlife Reports.
Obliteration of roads would be a change to the 2007 Travel Plan. The Travel Plan has been fully implemented in the Castles Geographic Area on Forest Service roads, and the Bonanza Project does not propose any changes to the Travel Plan.
Issue: The analysis for wildlife should include all existing roads, not just open roads. The open and total road densities are not disclosed. There is unauthorized use of closed roads and the Forest Service should disclose information about unauthorized road use (violations).
Response: The methodology for road densities used for analysis of effects to wildlife is included in the Wildlife Report. The Wildlife Report includes a revised elk security analysis incorporating existing roads.
The Wildlife Report has also been updated to include information about unauthorized road use, and data

on illegal and unauthorized motorized use data was also collcted from district staff and Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations for the project record.

The Project violates the Forest Plan; the Project EA violates NEPA; and/or the Revised Forest Plan violates the NFMA planning regulations regarding grizzlies.

As discussed above, the 2012 Planning Rule mandates: "Ecosystem Integrity.

The plan must include plan components, including standards or guidelines, to maintain or restore the ecological integrity of terrestrial . . . ecosystems . . . in the plan area, including plan components to maintain or restore . . . function . . . and connectivity[.]" 36 C.F.R. §219.8 (a)(1), The 2012 Planning Rule defines "connectivity:" "Ecological conditions . . . that provide landscape linkages that permit the . . . the dispersal and genetic interchange between populations . . . ." 36 C.F.R. §219.19. The 2012 Planning Rule defines "ecological conditions" to include "roads" and "human uses." 36 C.F.R. §219.19. The 2012 Planning Rule further states: "The responsible official shall determine whether or not the [coarse filter, habitat-based] plan components required by paragraph (a) of this section provide the ecological conditions necessary to: contribute to the

recovery of federally listed threatened . . . species . . . . If the responsible official determines that the plan components required in paragraph (a) are insufficient to provide such ecological conditions, then additional, species-specific plan components, including standards or guidelines, must be included in the plan to provide such ecological conditions in the plan area." 36 C.F.R. §219.9 (b)(1).

The 2012 Planning Rule explains: "NFS lands are a major contributor to threatened and endangered species recovery plans and actions . . . . As part of the Forest Service mission, the actions needed to recover T&E species . . . are a high priority. . . . As did the proposed rule, the final rule requires that the plan include plan components to provide ecological conditions in the plan area necessary to contribute to the recovery of T&E species, using coarse-filter plan components and adding species-specific plan components where necessary. While the 1982 rule . . . did have specific requirements . . .the requirement in the final rule that requires plan components to provide ecological conditions to 'contribute to the recovery of' T&E species is more comprehensive." Forest Plan Desired Condition requires: "The Castles [Geographic Area] provides habitat connectivity for wide ranging species (e.g., grizzly bear and others) between public lands in northern Montana and those in south and southwestern Montana, including lands in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. First, the

Project violates the Forest Plan. The Project does not meet Forest Plan Desired Condition because it fails to ensure “connectivity,” as that term is defined by the regulations, between the NCDE and Yellowstone grizzly populations. There are an insufficient number of secure habitat blocks, and even those habitat blocks that do exist are likely inaccessible and therefore useless to grizzly bears due to high road densities between habitat blocks. Moreover, if bears were heading south from the NCDE, they would have to cross the most northern part of the Project area first, which has an existing road density of 2.6 miles/square mile, and is therefore not likely crossable by a grizzly bear. In fact, the Project EA concedes that "grizzly bears are already likely being displaced by the current open road system." The facts that (1) grizzly bears are likely displaced from the Project area already due to high road density, (2) the Project allows an increase in roads during the Project, and (3) the Project will not reduce road density after implementation, establish that the Castles, including the Project area, is not being managed as a connectivity corridor to facilitate genetic exchange for grizzly bears between the NCDE and Yellowstone, as required by the Forest Plan. Accordingly, the Project violates the Forest Plan, in violation of NFMA.

Second, alternatively or in addition, the Project EA violates NEPA. The Project EA fails to take a hard look at connectivity, including the purpose and intent of Forest

Plan Desired Condition, and the ways that the Project could help to restore and achieve connectivity as envisioned by the Forest Plan. There is no meaningful discussion of the importance of establishing genetic connectivity between NCDE and Yellowstone grizzly populations, the necessity of that genetic connectivity for recovery of the grizzly population as a whole, and the ways in which current Forest Service management practices at the Project level, including this Project, are preventing the Castle Mountains from providing for connectivity. The Project area is currently failing every known scientific threshold for elk security, elk habitat effectiveness, and grizzly bear secure habitat. Additionally, the Project EA does not disclose road density between secure habitat blocks, which is a necessary element of any meaningful analysis of the impacts of roads on grizzly bears according to the best available science. The Forest Service's failure to take a hard look at connectivity, and failure to consider a reasonable range of alternatives that includes an alternative that implements the road closures necessary to allow the area to function as a connectivity corridor, violate NEPA and the APA. Third, alternatively or in addition, the Revised Forest Plan violates the 49

2012 NFMA Planning Rule. The Revised Forest Plan does not contain a standard or guideline to ensure "connectivity," as that term is defined by regulation to

mean a landscape linkage that allows for dispersal and genetic interchange between populations, for threatened grizzly bears using the Castle Mountains to genetically connect the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide grizzly populations. Restoring the "connectivity" and linkage corridor "function" of the Castle Mountains would "contribute to the recovery of" grizzly bears in the lower 48 states by genetically connecting the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide grizzly populations. The Revised Forest Plan violates the 2012 NFMA Planning Rule because implementing a "desired condition" for this issue is insufficient – the plain language of the regulation requires a standard or guideline. 36 C.F.R. §219.8 (a)(1). Moreover, as indicated by this Project, the Forest Service is simply ignoring the desired condition and making no attempt to consider a reasonable alternative that would take available actions through this Project to reduce road density and increase secure habitat to restore the connectivity function of the Castle Mountains. Restoring the connectivity function of the Castles is the missing link needed to recover the lower 48 grizzly population by facilitating genetic exchange between the NCDE and Yellowstone. The Forest Service's failure to implement a standard or guideline for restoring connectivity in the Little Belts and Castles to facilitate genetic interchange between the NCDE and Yellowstone grizzly populations, and thereby contribute to the recovery of the lower 48

grizzly population, thus violates the NFMA Planning Rule, NFMA, and the APA.

The Project EA fails to fully and fairly disclose accurate available data to the public regarding roads, and fails to take the requisite hard look at the cumulative effects of existing high road density, new Project roads, pervasive illegal motorized use, and roads closed-on-paper-only by the Travel Plans.

Grizzly bears, wolverines, and elk are all harmed by motorized use, including motorized roads and motorized trails on the Forest.

As discussed above, the Forest Service has multiple years of detailed information in its internal files regarding precise locations of illegal motorized use, failed road barriers, and roads "closed-on-paper-only" by the Travel Plans, but it did not disclose this available detailed information to the public in the Project EA. Does the Travel Plans disclose that there are roads "closed-on-paper-only" with no physical barriers? This information is not disclosed to the public in the Project EA, which violates the agency's obligations to fully and fairly inform the public, disclose accurate available data, and take a hard look at this issue in the Project EA.

Furthermore, the cumulative effects analyses for grizzly bears, wolverines, and elk all state that Travel Plan implementation is a factor that benefits these species, but

all three analyses fail to disclose that over 100 miles of closures promised under the Travel Plan have not yet been implemented. Additionally, the cumulative effects analyses for these three species dismiss illegal motorized use as something that "could occur anywhere on the Forest" and represent that "the amount, location, duration, and timing of effects resulting from such unauthorized use is not known" despite the Forest Service having detailed records with latitude/longitude coordinates for dozens of known, documented violations. Accordingly, the Project EA fails to provide the public with a quantified, detailed cumulative effects analysis of the impact of roads on road-sensitive wildlife species such as elk, grizzly bears, and wolverine – in particular, the Project EA fails to provide an accurate analysis of the cumulative effects of existing high open road density and lack of secure habitat, existing known unauthorized motorized use, "closed-on-paper" roads that are accessible to motorized vehicles, the decrease in secure habitat from the Project, and the likely increase in unauthorized motorized use from newly-constructed Project roads.

Remedy:

Choose the No Action Alternative or write an EIS that fully complies with the law.

We wrote in our comments:

III. Disclose maps of the area that show the following elements:

1. Past, current, and reasonably foreseeable logging units in the Project area;

2. Past, current, and reasonably foreseeable grazing allotments in the Project area;

3. Density of human residences within 1.5 miles from the Project unit boundaries;

4. Hiding cover in the Project area according to the Forest Plan definition;

5. Old growth forest in the Project area;

The project will violate the NEPA if there are no valid surveys for old growth habitat within each project area, as

identified by Green et al. 1992; old growth types need to be defined and quantified by timber types, such as lodgepole pine,

Douglas-fir, mixed conifer, spruce, subalpine fir, and limber pine.

Page 36 of the Preliminary EA states:

Old Growth

The Forest Silviculturist reviewed treatment units for the project and none of the treatment units were listed as old growth. The Forest had reviewed some units in the project area a few years ago due to concerns about the potential of old growth. None of the units measured were old growth (too young).

Reviewing some of the units a few years ago to see if they were old growth is not a valid survey. Please survey entire project area for old growth and replacement old growth.

Page 13 of the Preliminary EA states that the majority of trees in the Helena- Lewis and Clark National Forest are over 80 years old. Based on this the project area should have lots of old growth forests.

The project will likely violate the NEPA if the mitigation measures for MIS, sensitive species, and Montana Species of Concern (birds, mammals including bats) are not clearly de- fined, and demonstrated to be effective as per the current best science.

Please demonstrate that the poject complies with the migratory bird treaty act.

Will this project leave enough snags to follow the Forest Plan requirements and the requirements of sensitive old growth species such as flammulated owls and goshawks? Please survey the project area for old growth forests before the EA or EIS is finalized so the public has a chance to comment on it. Waiting until the NEPA process is over is a violation of NEPA, NFMA, and the APA. The Vegetation Report mentions Cover type and states:

Historically large grasslands dominated the central portion of the Castles GA.

The Forest Service responded.

As addressed in the Vegetation Report, none of the treatment units meet old growth definitions.

The Project violates the Forest Plan; the Project EA violates NEPA; and/or the Revised Forest Plan violates the NFMA planning regulations regarding old growth.

All previous paragraphs are incorporated by reference.

The 2012 Planning Rule mandates: "Ecosystem diversity. The plan must include plan components, including standards or guidelines, to maintain or restore the diversity of ecosystems and habitat types throughout the plan area. In doing so, the plan must include plan components to maintain or restore: . . . (ii) Rare . . . terrestrial. . . animal communities . . . ." 36 C.F.R. §219.9 (a)(2). Compliance with this provision "is intended to . . . support the persistence of most native species in the plan area." 36 C.F.R. §219.9.

The primary “rare terrestrial animal community” on the Forest is the old growth dependent wildlife species community.

The enforceable numeric old growth forest standards found in the prior forest
plans – to protect old growth dependent wildlife species – were removed from the Revised Forest Plan, and replaced with a desired condition and a guideline.

Revised Forest Plan Desired Condition FW-VEGF-DC-05 states: "Forest conditions support an abundance and distribution of old growth that is dynamic over time. All vegetation desired conditions help ensure that an appropriate array of conditions is present to provide old growth. The amount of old growth is similar to or greater than that of the 2018 existing condition. The desired condition of old growth is further described in Table 10."

Table 10 is set forth below, and states that the amount desired ranges from 6% to 20% old growth depending on the Forest type:

Table 10. Forestwide existing and desired conditions of old growth[1]

Region 1 broad potential vegetation types[2]	Existing condition[3]	Desired condition
Forestwide	11% (9-13)	Old growth is distributed widely across the forest and in every GA, and levels vary depending on available compositions and structures, disturbance levels, and management objectives. Old growth may be subject to wider pulses of availability than in the past due to the likelihood of increased extent and/or severity of wildfire disturbances. Old growth distribution that complements habitat connectivity is desired. Old growth contains components that contribute to high quality habitat, including large and/or very large live trees with rot or broken tops, snags, downed woody material, and a diversity of tree size classes and canopy layers. A variety of old growth types are present, representing the natural species diversity of the HLC NF.
Warm dry	8% (6-11)	Old growth is dominated by ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and/or limber pine, often in large patches with an uneven-aged and irregular tree distribution. Ponderosa pine-dominated old growth is particularly desirable, because it is currently rare. Stands are resilient to low severity disturbance. Other old growth types such as spruce/fir occur in riparian areas. Species such as juniper and aspen are valuable habitat components.

Region 1 broad potential vegetation types[2]	Existing condition[3]	Desired condition
Cool moist	14% (10-19)	Old growth is subject to wider pulses of availability relative to the other potential vegetation types, due to the higher severity disturbance regimes in this type. Old growth includes spruce/fir or Douglas-fir dominated stands, often with dense canopy layers, as well as lodgepole pine. Landscape-level resiliency is provided by a mosaic of younger forests that grow to replace old growth when it is killed by stand-replacing events.
Cold	15% (11-20)	Old growth generally consists of whitebark pine, Engelmann spruce, and/or subalpine fir. Stand-level resiliency and open structures is desired in whitebark pine types versus spruce/fir types which may be denser and more layered.

[1] See glossary and appendix D for definitions of old growth.
[2] Region 1 broad forested potential vegetation type. Also see appendix D.
[3] Existing condition (2018) is the mean percent of old growth with the 90% confidence interval (see glossary) shown in parenthesis. Source is R1 Summary Database, FIA data.

The Forest-wide desired condition is 9% - 13% old growth.

The “warm dry” forest-type desired condition is 6% - 11%.

The “cool moist” forest-type desired condition is 10% - 19%.
The “cold” forest-type desired condition is 11% - 20%.

Table 10 further states: “Old growth is distributed widely across the forest and in every [Geographic Area], and levels vary depending on available compositions and structures, disturbance levels, and management objectives.”
Table 10 further states: “Old growth distribution that complements habitat connectivity is desired.”

Revised Forest Plan Guideline FW-VEGF-GDL-04 states: To promote the retention of old growth (see glossary) and contribute to biodiversity, vegetation management activities in old growth stands should only occur for one or both of the following purposes. Management activities conducted for these purposes should retain all minimum quantitative

old growth characteristics as well as qualitative attributes to the extent possible.

- * Maintain or restore old growth habitat characteristics and ecosystem processes.
- * Increase resistance and resilience to disturbances or stressors that may have negative impacts on old growth characteristics or abundance (such as drought, wildfire, and bark beetles).
  Exceptions to this guideline are allowed for the following purposes:
- * Where needed to mitigate imminent hazards to: (1) public safety in campgrounds, other designated recreation sites, administrative sites, and permitted special use areas; or (2) infrastructure that is essential to community welfare (e.g., utilities, communications, and where fire modeling shows a risk to evacuation routes).
- * Where project analysis has identified a need to remove a proportion of lodgepole pine old growth to achieve a diversity of age classes.

The Revised Forest Plan defines old growth: “an ecosystem distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. For the HLC NF, old growth stands are specifically defined as those that meet the definitions in Green et al. 1992 (errata corrected 12/11). Those definitions include the discussion in that document titled “USE OF OLD GROWTH TYPE DESCRIPTIONS”

(pages 11 and 12). If that document is revised or replaced by the Northern Region, the updated version will be used. Old growth identification and mapping is dynamic through time to reflect changing conditions on the landscape."

Green et al states: "Minimum Criteria: [1] Minimum Age of Large Trees - This is the minimum average age for the largest size class for the old growth type[;] [2]Number TPA/DBH - Number of live trees per acre equal to or greater than a given dbh level and age. This would be the minimum number of live trees per acre equal to or greater than a set dbh level and age[;] and [3] Minimum Basal Area - the minimum basal area in square feet for trees equal to or greater than 5" dbh."

The Green et al Minimum Criteria for each forest in the Eastside Montana forest types are set forth below:

DESCRIPTION		MINIMUM CRITERIA		
OLD GROWTH TYPE	HABITAT TYPE GROUP	MINIMUM AGE OF LARGE TREES	MINIMUM NUMBER TPA/DBH	MINIMUM BASAL AREA (FT^2/AC)
1 – DF	A	200	4 ≥ 17”	60
2 – DF	B,C,D,E,F,H	200	5 ≥ 19”	60
3 – DF	G	180	10 ≥ 17”	80
4 – PP	A,B,C,K	180	4 ≥ 17”	40
5 – PF	A,B	120	6 ≥ 09”	50
6 – LP	A,B,C,D,E, F,G,H,I	150	12 ≥ 10”	50
7 – SAF	C	160	12 ≥ 17”	80
8 – SAF	D,E	160	7 ≥ 17”	80
9 – SAF	F,G,H,I	160	10 ≥ 13”	60
10 – SAF	J	135	8 ≥ 13”	40
11 – WBP	D,E,F,G,H,I	150	11 ≥ 13”	60
12 – WBP	J	135	7 ≥ 13”	40

In this Project area, for example, old growth logging is permitted in Douglas- fir Type 1 (DF 1) and Douglas-fir Type 2 (DF 2) old growth types, which only require

retention of a minimum of 4 or 5 large trees over 200 years/ old per acre.

Accordingly, there is no longer any enforceable numeric standard for old growth forest retention on the Forest, and logging is permitted in old growth forest down to the "minimum criteria" listed in Green et al., which in cases such as this Project require the retention of only 4 or 5 large trees per acre.

First, the Project violates the Forest Plan. The Project EA does not disclose whether the Forest Service is currently complying with the desired condition of a minimum of 9% old growth Forest-wide, 6% old growth for warm dry types, 10% old growth for cool moist types, and 11% old growth for cold types. The assessment for the Forest Plan was issued over 5 years ago, and since that time logging, windthrow, wildfires, and beetle kill have occurred that may have changed the existing condition. The Forest Plan requires this analysis at both the Forest level, as well as the Geographic Area level, but the Project EA does not disclose the existing old growth condition at either level. Moreover, the Forest Plan specifies that old growth must be widely distributed and provide for connectivity at both the Forest level and the Geographic Area level; the only way to determine whether there is wide distribution that contributes to connectivity is with a map. For all of these reasons, the Forest Service is violating the Revised Forest Plan, in violation of NFMA, NEPA, and the APA.

Second, alternatively or in addition, the Project EA violates NEPA. The Project EA fails to take a hard look at whether old growth complies with desired percentages discussed above, and is widely distributed and contributes to connectivity across the Forest and in every Geographic Area, including the Castle Mountains Geographic Area. There are no Forest-wide or Geographic Area-wide disclosures of percentages of existing old growth, or maps showing distribution and connectivity of old growth at these scales. Thus, the Project EA fails to take a hard look and fully and fairly inform the public and agency as to whether the Project is consistent with the text, purpose, and intent of Forest Plan Desired Condition FW-VEGF-DC-05, and fails to take a hard look at the ways that the Project could help to restore and achieve wide distribution and connectivity of old growth habitat as envisioned by the Forest Plan. Furthermore, under Kern v. BLM, the Project EA must include the cumulative effects analysis on old growth dependent wildlife species that is missing from the Revised Forest Plan EIS. Without this analysis at the Project EA level, the Project analysis unlawfully tiers to the Revised Forest Plan EIS. As discussed below, the Revised Forest Plan EIS fails to provide any meaningful cumulative effects analysis as to how the removal of enforceable minimum standards for old growth retention, and the allowance of commercial logging in old growth forest stands across the Forest, will cumulatively degrade habitat for old growth dependent wildlife species and

prevent the Forest from maintaining viable populations of this rare, native terrestrial wildlife community.

Third, alternatively or in addition, the Revised Forest Plan violates the 2012 NFMA Planning Rule and/or NEPA. The old growth provisions in the Revised Forest Plan, which fail to set enforceable numeric minimum percentages of old growth retention for the Forest, and at the same time allow significant commercial logging in old growth while still labeling it as "old growth" post-logging, lack ecological integrity, including lacking appropriate elements to ensure function and connectivity of old growth forest for the rare terrestrial wildlife community of old growth dependent wildlife species, and therefore the Revised Forest Plan violates the NFMA planning regulations, NFMA, and the APA.

Furthermore, there is no adequate cumulative effects analysis in the Revised Forest Plan EIS regarding the impact on old growth dependent wildlife species across the Forest from this new, piecemeal, project-by-project, death by a thousand cuts approach to old growth forest management. Without a Forest-wide cumulative effects analysis of how old growth logging will impact old-growth dependent wildlife species, the Forest Service cannot demonstrate that its Forest Plan complies with NEPA or the NFMA planning rule mandate that the Forest Plan maintains or restore the "rare terrestrial animal community" of old growth dependent wildlife species.

Remedy:

Choose the No Action Alternative or write an EIS that fully complies with the law.

We wrote in our comments:

If the project will reduce hiding cover below the minimum recommended level of 40%, then the project will have significant adverse impacts on elk, which would require completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The failure to complete any surveys for any wildlife species except for the presence/absence of the Flammulated Owl is apparently justified by the large size of the project. Treatment of alproject area would require a massive survey effort to detect nest and roost sites of focal species. It would also require a massive effort to survey for neotropical migratory birds, which includes the Northern Goshawk and Great Gray Owl. The fact that large projects prevents any valid reliable surveys for wildlife means that these project will automatically have significant adverse impacts of a host of wildlife species, requiring an EIS. The attached Forest Service Handbook 1109.12, Chapter 10 states that Scoping is required for all Forest Service proposed actions, including those that would appear to be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EA or an EIS (§220.6).

A key requirement of the scoping process is to: "(1) Determine the scope (§1508.25) and the significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the environmental impact statement."

The Forest Service has skipped this step and gone right to asking the public to comment in the EA.

We believe because of the size of the project and the cumulative effects of past current and future logging by the Forest Service and private logging in the area the Forest Service must complete a full environmental impact statement (EIS) for this Project. The scope of the Project will likely have a significant individual and cumulative impact on the environment. Alliance has reviewed the statutory and regulatory requirements governing National Forest Management projects, as well as the relevant case law, and compiled a checklist of issues that must be included in the EIS for he Project in order for the Forest

Service's analysis to comply with the law. Following the list of necessary elements, Alliance has also included a general narrative discussion on possible impacts of the Project, with accompanying citations to the relevant scientific literature. These references should be disclosed and discussed in the EIS for an EA if you refuse to write an EA for the Project.

The Forest Service responded:

Response: The Forest Service has determined that the proposed action would not result in any significant impacts, and an EA is the appropriate NEPA documentation. Cumulative effects are described in each resource report. In the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the responsible official has determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment in either context or intensity, individually or cumulatively per 40 CFR 1508.27. The FONSI and Notice are available on the project website (https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=66532).

The Forest Service's failure to prepare an EIS for the Project violates NEPA.

All previous paragraphs are incorporated by reference.

Agencies must prepare an EIS for federal actions that will "significantly affect[] the quality of the human environment." 42 U.S.C. §4332(2)

An EIS is required when an EA raises "substantial questions" that an agency action will have a significant environmental effect.

In challenging an agency decision not to prepare an EIS, plaintiffs need not prove that significant environmental effects will occur; they need only raise a substantial question that they might. This presents a low standard. The Council on Environmental Quality has adopted regulations governing the implementation of NEPA. In determining whether a federal action requires an EIS because it significantly affects the quality of the human environment, an agency must consider what "significantly" means. The regulations give it two components: context and intensity. 40 C.F.R. §1508.27. Context refers to the setting in which the proposed action takes place; intensity means "the severity of the impact." Id.

There are ten severity factors to consider. 40 C.F.R. §1508.27.

The Ninth Circuit holds: "one of these factors may be sufficient to require preparation of an EIS in appropriate circumstances." Ocean Advocates. v.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 402 F.3d 846 (9th Cir. 2005).

ADVERSE &/OR CUMULATIVELY SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. A full EIS
is necessary for the Project because it may have a cumulatively significant impact on wildlife species that are harmed by roads such as elk, grizzly bears, and wolverines. MFWP found that the Project will have a cumulative effect on elk, and the cumulative effect is significant because 90-95% of elk are displaced from Forest lands during elk hunting season due to extremely low security on the National Forest, and this displacement will be exacerbated by the Project. There are also cumulative effects that the Project EA fails to address such as cumulative effects of illegal motorized use and "closed-on-paper-only" roads, and cumulative effects on old growth dependent species from Forest-wide old growth logging.

ADVERSE EFFECT TO ESA SPECIES. A full EIS is necessary for the Project because it is undisputed that the

Project is likely to adversely affect at least one ESA species – whitebark pine.

This is a violation of NEPA. The DDN calls for 40.7 miles of new roads. The Forest Service did admit there are many miles if illegal roads that appear to violate the Forest Plan and the roadless rule. The Forest Service provided no evidence that they are compying with the roadless rule.

REMEDY:

The remedy is the withdraw the Draft Decision Notice and write an EIS that fully complies with the law.

We wrote in our comments:

W. Please disclose how often the Project area has been surveyed for wolverines, pine martins, northern goshawks, monarch butterflies, grizzly bears, whitebark pine and lynx.

X. Is it impossible for a wolverines, pine martins, monarch butterflies, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, whitebark pine and lynx to inhabit the Project area?

Y. Would the habitat be better for wolverines, monarch butterflies, pine martins, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, whitebark pine and lynx if roads were removed in the Project area?

Z. What is the U.S. FWS position on the impacts of this Project on wolverines, pine martins, monarch butterflyies, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, whitebark pine and lynx? Have you conducted ESA consultation?

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely yours,

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